

# *The Mentoring Spectrum*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In a traditional mentoring relationship, the mentor guides the protégé and shares wisdom gained from his or her career. Each mentoring relationship is unique, a direct result of the individual personalities of the two participants. While some mentoring relationships are very brief, perhaps only the duration of a project (or deployment), others can last an entire career, or even longer. The purpose of this paper is to present a model, the Mentoring Spectrum, to describe the broad range of mentoring relationships that can exist between a mentor and a protégé. It starts with the simplest relationship, the Role Model, and continues with deeper and more complex relationships until it reaches the epitome of mentorship, the Counselor. The goal of this article is to present the continuum of mentoring relationships so that mentors and protégés can better understand the various options for mentoring partnerships that are available to them.

## **ROLE MODEL**

The Role Model is the first type of mentoring relationship in the Mentoring Spectrum and is the simplest. In this relationship, the senior officer serves as an example for the junior officer to follow. By observing the mentor, the protégé learns what is proper personal and professional behavior. While this form of mentoring relationship is more passive than the others that will be described, it is still an active form of mentoring. In some cases, the mentor may not even know that a particular subordinate is watching and modeling the superior officer's pattern of behavior. Regardless, the seasoned leader knows that he or she is being watched and could be serving as a role model for junior officers to follow. So, senior officers need to remember that they are always "on stage" and are potentially mentoring through their daily "performances."

## **PRECEPTOR**

Unlike the Role Model, the Preceptor is a much more active and engaged form of mentoring. The term

preceptor is borrowed from examples in medicine, where a new physician is paired with a more experienced clinician who serves as a teacher and is expected to instruct the neophyte on what he or she needs to know clinically. Therefore, this type of mentoring relationship usually occurs in the early phases of a junior officer's career. In the case of the Preceptor, both the mentor and the protégé are aware of each other and their relationship. The mentoring focus is strictly technical, on the development of specific skills. Typically, the relationship only lasts until the protégé has mastered the requisite skills and has therefore completed the preceptorship. However, in some cases, a bond may be formed that can blossom into a deeper mentoring relationship. I know this was true for me; my longtime mentor started out by teaching me how to perform physics testing of medical x-ray systems when I was a brand new second lieutenant. But his genuine interest in my technical development and the rapport that developed between us set the stage for the growth of a much deeper mentoring relationship that continues to this day.

## **COACH**

The next role in the Mentoring Spectrum is the Coach. Unlike the Preceptor, the Coach is focused on the overall job performance of the protégé, not just the mastering of an individual task or skill. So, the Coach is concerned with mission accomplishment and how the protégé functions within the unit or organization. Supervisors typically mentor their subordinates by being Coaches. Because the mentoring focus is on job performance (and the Coach may also be personally accountable for the success or failure of the protégé), there may be some limitations to the depth of this relationship. For example, the protégé may be reluctant to share doubts or weaknesses with the mentor for fear of receiving a bad rating. Also, if the senior leader supervises more than one junior officer, the cautious mentor might be concerned about the appearance of favoritism by providing more mentoring to one subordinate over another. As a result, the level of trust between mentor and protégé may be limited when the mentoring relationship is one of coaching.

## The Mentoring Spectrum

### ADVISOR

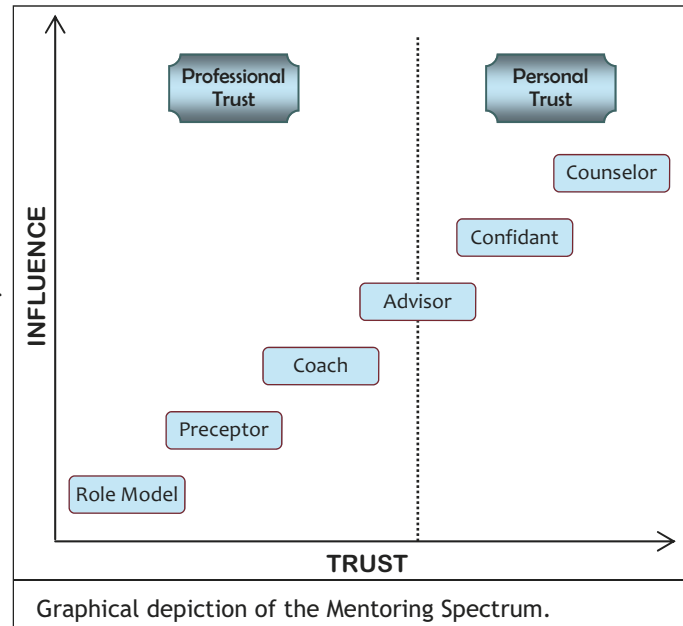
While an Advisor is also concerned with protégé job performance, this mentor is also focused on the junior officer's career and professional development. Hence, the Advisor often becomes involved in issues such as future duty assignments and pursuing advanced civilian and military schooling. Career or specialty consultants usually have an Advisor-like mentoring relationship with the junior officers in their Area of Concentration (AOC). Hence, these mentors also delve into more personal matters, such as family issues pertaining to a proposed permanent change of station (having a child in his or her senior year of high school) or a deployment (having a brand new baby on the way). However, since the consultant literally holds the protégé's career in the palm of his or her hand, the wary protégé may be reluctant to share everything with the Advisor (such as doubts about continuing an Army career or thoughts about transferring to another AOC).

### CONFIDANT

After sufficient trust has developed between the mentor and protégé, then the mentoring relationship can deepen with the mentor becoming a Confidant. The Confidant is more trusted and fully capable of dealing with personal issues that the protégé may have (for example, marital problems, uncertainty about continuing an Army career, or the decision about whether or not to retire). Since the protégé deeply trusts the mentor, he or she is not reluctant to discuss sensitive topics such as personality conflicts with other senior officers or dissatisfaction with AOC leadership. For the protégé, the Confidant serves as a sounding board for ideas and helps to brainstorm solutions to problems of both a personal and professional nature.

### COUNSELOR

The Counselor is the pinnacle of the mentoring spectrum and is the fullest and deepest expression of the mentoring relationship. He or she is an avatar of the personae Mentor, in Homer's *Odyssey*. With a Counselor, a protégé can discuss any topic and will seek guidance from the mentor in either personal or professional matters. As a result, the Counselor remains an enduring influence on the protégé and the relationship can last for decades. It is important to note that it normally takes a long time to reach this depth of mentoring. In my case, it took approximately 10 years before my mentoring relationship deepened to the level where my mentor became my Counselor.



### THE MENTORING SPECTRUM

The previous discussion outlined the 6 different mentoring relationships that can exist between mentors and protégés. The Figure shows these relationships as a part of the Mentoring Spectrum. In the Figure, the x-axis is labeled as "Trust" (referring to the protégé's trust) and the y-axis is labeled as "Influence" (or the mentor's influence). As the graph depicts, as a protégé's trust increases, so does the mentor's influence. So, a Counselor has more trust and more influence than a Confidant, who has more trust and more influence than an Advisor, etc. Within the graph there is a dividing line near the center. To left of this dividing line is a region labeled as "Professional Trust" and to the right of this dividing line is a region labeled as "Personal Trust." This line of demarcation reflects the transition from a protégé only sharing work or career related issues (demonstrating professional trust) to ultimately opening up and including personal matters (demonstrating personal trust). In most cases, this transition tends to occur at the point when a mentor becomes an Advisor, although the actual transition point will vary for each individual mentor-protégé pairing.

### SUMMARY

The purpose of this paper is to discuss the Mentoring Spectrum, a model which helps to explain the various mentoring relationships that can occur between a mentor and a protégé. First, a senior leader can be a Role Model, setting the example for known and

unknown protégés alike. Next, a superior officer can become a Preceptor and teach the protégé a specific skill or task. When mentors are Coaches, they are focused on improving the overall quality of duty performance and may also have a personal stake in the protégé's success. As an Advisor, a mentor has a longer perspective in mind and guides the protégé towards career development and professional growth. After personal trust is earned, a mentor can become a Confidant and be a sounding board for more sensitive and personal matters. Finally, a mentor can reach the summit of mentoring and become a Counselor, providing the entire range of guidance typically associated with the mentor archetype. As the

Mentoring Spectrum illustrates, when the mentor gains more and more trust, he or she has more and more influence over the protégé, to include ultimately matters of a highly personal nature. It is hoped that by understanding these different mentoring relationships, mentors and protégé can select the type of partnership that is the best fit for them.

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